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ABSTRACT

In 1992, community leaders in Fort Collins, Colorado, met with their concerns about the needs of low-income families for comprehensive services. This paper describes the resulting Family Learning Place, a community-based, public-private collaborative program that serves preschool children and their families. The program operates in facilities provided by Children's World Learning Centers, a private company. The community organizations involved in the project run a variety of programs funded through a combination of sliding scale tuition, Head Start funds, social services reimbursement, and other community services. These programs include: (1) Project Grow, a life skills, literacy, and parenting education program for parents; (2) an adult literacy program run by a community college; (3) an on-site case-manager; (4) a Head Start class for 20 preschoolers; (5) child care; and (6) a summer program for school-age children. The paper examines the reasons for the success of the Family Learning Place, which include the opportunity for input from all agencies in the planning process, and the availability of a building that met the needs of all the programs involved. The reasons why the private preschool is involved in the project are also discussed. The paper concludes by noting that the Family Learning Place demonstrates that private and public agencies serving children and families can, in fact, work effectively together to serve the community. (MDM)

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ED 380 219

PRIVATE-PUBLIC COLLABORATION: A WIN-WIN SOLUTION

by

Kim Moore and Francis Wardle *

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In 1992, community leaders in Fort Collins, Colorado, were concerned about the need of low income families for a variety of comprehensive services. A group of these community leaders met together to assess the child care needs of the community, determine services that could be provided and explore options for space to house the needed programs. The challenge was to see whether the range of state and national programs could be provided in a seamless, one-stop manner.

A core planning group was formed to further explore these issues. Represented in this group were these community organizations: Poudre R1 School District (which also is the Head Start grantee), Larimer Department of Social Services, Front Range Community College, Larimer County Employment and Training Services, and Children's World Learning Centers. Through these discussions, it was determined Children's World Learning Centers had an underutilized building in an appropriate part of town. Further planning sessions produced the concept of the Family Learning Place.

The Family Learning Place is a community-based program that serves children, 6 weeks to school-age, in the Children's World Learning Center facility. This facility

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provides classroom space for each age group, two developmentally appropriate playgrounds, kitchen, office space for the case manager and center director, and classroom space for the adult workshops and organizational meetings. Because the building was designed and built as a child care facility, it is very functional for the needs of all involved. Storage, parking, dish-washing and other needed aspects of a center are all included.

The community organizations involved in this project run a variety of programs which are funded through a combination of sliding scale tuition, Head Start funds, Social Services reimbursement, and other community services. This enables low-income residents of the community to receive comprehensive services.

Project Grow. Funded through social services, this agency provides adult instruction in a variety of areas, including life skills, literacy, and parenting. This agency also provides a case-worker, who assists parents in selecting classes, filling out paperwork, and helping their children enter the appropriate program. The caseworker works closely with parents to make sure they are moving toward the goals, and that problems are resolved.

Adult Literacy. These services are provided by the local community college, Front Range Community College, and the Employment and Training Services. These classes also prepare adults for the job market, and move them into community college programs.

Head Start. 20 Head Start children can be served in a Head Start classroom, that meets 1/2 day, 5 days a week. The Head Start staff are hired, supervised, trained and paid for by the school district, which is the Head Start grantee. They

follow all Head Start regulations, including parent involvement and parent training. Also additional services, including special needs, health screening, testing, etc. are provided.

Infant, Toddler, Threes, and Wrap Around Child Care. These programs are run by Children's World Learning Centers (staff, training, administration, and supervision). Children's World Learning Centers is a corporate child care provider that has served families nationally since 1969. Children birth to age 12 are served in centers, elementary schools, and employer based programs. Children's World serves over 75,000 children in 23 states.

Summer Program. Administered by Children's World Learning Centers, this program is for school-age children up to age 12, and is funded by sliding scale and social services.

Children stay at the Family Learning Place all day, all week. Head Start children remain in the Head Start classroom after the Head Start activity finishes at noon. They also use the wrap around program during public school vacations. Their younger siblings attend other classrooms; their parents access the adult programs. Parents who attend the classes, and don't normally have their children at the center, can place their children in the program while attending class or GED activities.

The Family Learning Center is administered by a Children's World Learning Center Director, who is part of the Children's World administrative structure. All center-based issues - maintenance, janitorial services, snow removal, lawn care - are maintained by Children's World.

WHY DOES THE FAMILY LEARNING PLACE WORK?

We believe the Family Learning Place effectively meets the needs of families for a variety of specific reasons:

- All agencies providing services were involved in the initial planning process.
- All leaders of the agencies are very knowledgeable of the community, it's needs, and resources to support families and children.
- None of the agencies compete with each other for funds, children or clients.
- Each agency sees the need for the program for their agency. It's not a question of one agency dragging all the others along.
- Each agency is well aware of the funding and regulatory limitations of the other agencies.
- Each agency is very flexible in applying their rules and regulations.
- The program provides parents one stop shopping for many of their needs.
- The case manager is the critical link to the success of this venture.
- A building that met the needs of each program was available in a good location.
- Having each agency supervise and administer their own program (including pay scales, personnel policies, and regulations) prevents people comparing and complaining, and prevents low morale based on these comparisons. Each program is operated as its own independent program.
- All agencies have the same philosophy for adults and children. For example: Head Start supports parent training and education, as does Social Services and Children's World; Children's World and Head Start are committed to Developmentally Appropriate Practice, multicultural education and supporting

children with special needs; both Children's World and Head Start use a quality assurance process to maintain quality, etc.

- Programs cover for each other, and combine trainings, materials, substitutes, etc.

We believe the Family Learning Place is one example of how local agencies that serve children and families - both the private and public sector - can successfully work together.

WHY IS CHILDREN'S WORLD LEARNING CENTERS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?

While there are several examples of community-based public agencies working collaboratively together to serve children and families, few examples exist that include an active private player. Why is Children's World Learning Centers involved in the Family Learning Place? "We realize the education and welfare of children is the responsibility of each one of us," says Duane Larson, President of Children's World Learning Centers. "None of us can do it all -- we must work together to best meet the needs of our families." Children's World is also committed to bridge the perceived barriers between private and public child care providers. In many CWLC programs there are some Social Service paid children, and CWLC is interested in combining training with Head Start and other community agencies.

Children's World Learning Centers views the future of child care as increased collaboration between the private and public sectors, sharing of training and solutions to problems we all face, and working closely with professional organizations to increase quality for all of our children. The tremendous needs of low income children

require a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach. While public providers are better able to provide some of the needed programs, private companies are effective at certain specific services.

We believe that our private status allows for more flexibility in meeting every-day problems and variations. Private companies do not have all the rules, regulations and restrictions government funded programs must follow. For example, we can take an extra child in the infant room for a few hours (so long at this doesn't affect licensing regulations), we can provide child care for the Head Start students when the schools are closed and the teachers are in training or on vacation.

Further, Children's World Learning Centers is a company designed around the needs of working parents. We know how to keep centers open year round, how to be open from early to late, and how to create before and after school-age programs to address the issues of latch key children. We develop trainings, arrange vacations, and create back-up systems, with one idea in mind: quality care for children when needed by their families.

"CREATING A 21ST CENTURY HEAD START"

The document "Creating a 21st Century Head Start" (ACF, Dec., 1993) makes some very specific suggestions about improving Head Start. Some of these recommendations that are being implemented at the Family Learning Place include:

- Forging new partnerships at the local level;
- Adapting to meet the needs of changing families, communities and national policies;
- Promoting full day, full year programs.

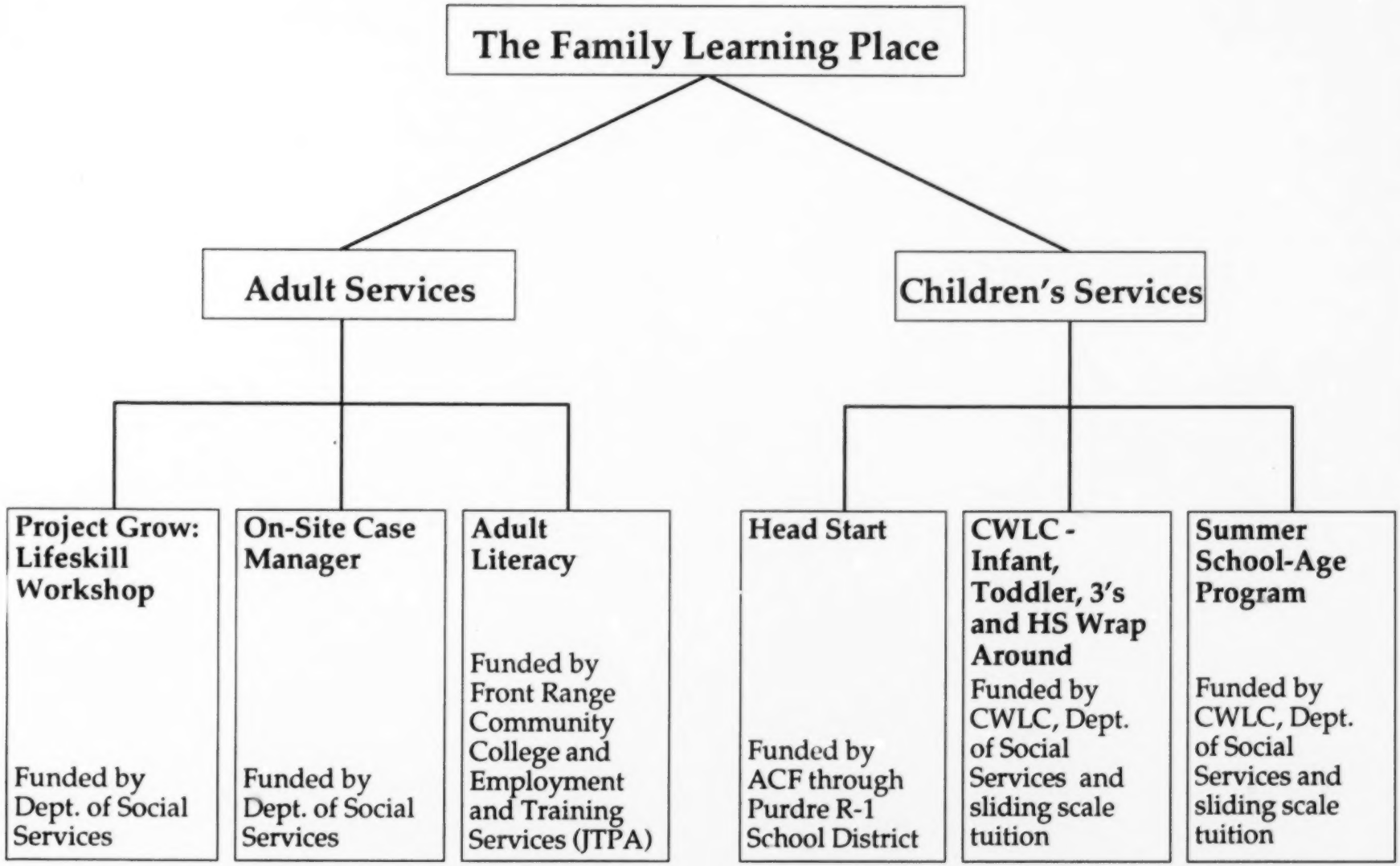
- Serving children younger that the traditional Head Start child;
- Joining Head Start with other agencies in the community that serve low income families;
- Providing a quality, developmentally appropriate approach that is a consistent across all programs serving the children;
- Forming partnerships at the local level with the private sector;
- Providing unified planning, by all community-based agencies that serve children and families;
- Providing classes and training for Head Start parents;
- Providing a safe, appropriately designed, well maintained building for children and parents (the report claims 33% of Head Start facilities are inadequate);
- Providing wrap-around child care for Head Start children and their siblings;
- Promoting collaboration between all agencies in the community serving children, 0-8 yrs old.

The report stresses collaboration of all community agencies that serve low-income families. Further, it rightfully suggest we eliminate expensive duplication of services.

CONCLUSION

The Family Learning Place demonstrates that private and public agencies serving children and families can work effectively together to serve the community. Initial planning by all involved agencies, constant communication and problems solving, and the ability to be highly flexible and understanding of the constraints of others, are the secret to the success of this venture. But most critical is the

commitment by all involved to want to serve the needs of children and their families. We don't propose this model as the only solution to local collaboration; but we do believe it is one successful solution to what the 21st Century Head Start report says, "creating a variety of local Head Start models to meet the full day, full year needs of Head Start families." The Family Learning Place is a model that includes a variety of community agencies serving a range of children and families, including Head Start families.


The Family Learning Place
Adult Services
Children's Services
Project Grow: Lifeskill Workshop
Funded by Dept. of Social Services
On-Site Case Manager
Funded by Dept. of Social Services
Adult Literacy
Funded by Front Range Community College and Employment and Training Services (JTPA)
Head Start
Funded by ACF through Purdre R-1 School District
CWLC - Infant, Toddler, 3's and HS Wrap Around
Funded by CWLC, Dept. of Social Services and sliding scale tuition
Summer School-Age Program
Funded by CWLC, Dept. of Social Services and sliding scale tuition